

Washington, DC – The “Senator Paul Simon Water for the Poor Act of 2005,” was passed by a margin of 319 to 34 late last evening. H.R. 1973, authored by Congressman Earl Blumenauer (D – Ore.) and cosponsored by over 100 bipartisan members of the House, expands access to clean water for millions of people in the developing world. The bill honors the late Senator Paul Simon (D-Ill.), an early leader on issues of safe drinking water and sanitation.

“Not only is this bill the right thing to do, it recognizes that what we do abroad affects our security, our jobs, our health, and our way of life,” Blumenauer said shortly after the bill’s passage.

Blumenauer’s legislation highlights a pressing issue: because of lack of access to safe water and sanitation, one child dies unnecessarily every 15 seconds. Safe water and sanitation access are critical to achieving United States development objectives, such as fighting poverty and promoting girls’ education. For example, studies show that millions of hours of economic productivity are lost because, at any given time, half of the people in the developing world are sick from a water-related disease and that access to water empowers women and girls who, in many places, are unable to get an education or hold a job because they have to spend hours walking to fetch water for their families.

The “Senator Paul Simon Water for the Poor Act,” which has been called “landmark legislation,” establishes providing affordable and equitable access to water and sanitation as a major objective of United States foreign policy and directs the Secretary of State to develop a strategy with specific timetables, benchmarks, and goals to bring together water programs across the federal government, to integrate water and sanitation into other development programs, and to meet the commitment made by the United States and 185 other countries to halve the percentage of people without access to safe water or sanitation by 2015. It ensures that water and sanitation assistance is focused on the places with the greatest need, includes efforts to build developing world capacity so recipients do not remain dependant on U.S. assistance, and sets policy to ensure that water and sanitation assistance is cost-effective.

Blumenauer’s bill, H.R. 1973, complements legislation introduced by Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist, S.492, the “Safe Water: Currency for Peace Act.” The bill now awaits action by the Senate, where Senator Frist has pledged to work to merge the two bills for enactment this Congress.

Houses Passes “Senator Paul Simon Water for the Poor Act”

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